



Leatherhead & District Local History Society Newsletter June 2017



Leatherhead High Street in 1932 left and 2017 below. For a still earlier view, see top photo, Page 27.



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Above: Wartime poster from the new Museum exhibition.

PAULINE HULSE

We are sorry to report the death of Pauline Hulse on 5 February, writes PETER TARPLEE. She regularly attended our lectures but her main interest was practical archaeology. She took part in many excavations and was a very active member of Surrey Archaeological Society. When Ernest Crossland retired, she replaced him and served as our Archaeology Secretary for five years between 2000 and 2005. She was also one of the team who spent several years processing and cataloguing our archaeological collection.



EDITORIAL

We live in exciting times, equally true of our Society and Museum. This Newsletter carries news of the Museum reopening in April with an array of new attractions to mark our 70th anniversary and help boost our public profile.

It followed our most successful monthly talk for many years with record attendance in February to hear Richard Selley talking about the River Mole at the Leatherhead Institute.

This summer also sees two areas hosting events for members, beginning with a talk and tour at Fetcham Park House on 5 July for ticketholders. An application form is included with this edition and early orders are strongly recommended as it is likely to be very popular. Entrance will be free and our members and their guests enjoy priority booking so do aim to apply by Friday 16 June if you can. The first talk at 6pm will be repeated.

Then on 9 August, Pat Jenkins, our April speaker, will follow up her talk with a tour of Ashtead Park. The tour will start at 10.30am. Again the numbers could be high so make a note in your diaries.

See Page 10 for the complete programme ahead, including what may well be our biggest event of all in November when Bamber Gascoigne, the original *University Challenge* TV presenter, will be talking at Leatherhead Theatre about his extraordinary inheritance of West Horsley Place, now the new home of the Grange Park Opera. We are hoping this will also begin a lasting new relationship between the Museum and the theatre for mutual benefit.

This year's AGM in March saw unanimous backing for a change in the Society's status to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This should strengthen our legal position and bodes well for the future. See Pages 4 and 5 for more details on this.

TONY MATTHEWS

*Newsletter contributions to editor@lheadmuseum.plus.com
Next edition deadline - 31 July 2017*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING TREASURER'S REPORT

By CARL LEYSHON

A large part of the AGM papers were taken up with a proposal to change the legal structure of the Society. I explained why this was proposed and answered the following questions.



Q: Why change the Society's legal status?

A: The Executive Committee has been concerned for some time that having the Society as an unincorporated charity leaves the trustees open to unlimited liability. This means that should any liabilities be incurred that the Society could not meet, the trustees would potentially be exposed to covering those outstanding. The EC believes the unincorporated status deters some members from becoming trustees.

Q: What is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)?

A: CIO status is a type of legal structure introduced in 2013 which is specifically designed for small to mid-sized charities. A CIO is a legal entity in its own right and can therefore enter into contracts and take on liabilities in its own name. This means trustees do not have to enter into contracts in their personal capacity which, in turn, limits their potential for personal liability. A CIO is fully regulated by the Charity Commission.

Q: Will there be new Society Rules?

A: Yes, although our charitable objects will remain the same. The Rules will be replaced by a Constitution based on a model published by the Charity Commission. The membership approved having a CIO constitution for the Society at the AGM on 17 March 2017.

Q: How long will it take to set up the new CIO?

A: We will need time to liaise with the Charity Commission. The process involves transferring contracts and assets, changing bank accounts etc. We will aim to make the change effective for the new financial year.

Q: What will happen to my existing Society membership?

A: Members of the current charity will automatically become members of the new CIO.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

By JOHN ROWLEY

Our 2017 AGM was a success, I think, because of careful preparation and smart chairing by our President. Two special resolutions that required substantial votes in favour were achieved. The first was to update the Society's functional rules as we understand them. We made some clarifications to the objectives.



This led to a proposal from the floor for a further objective concerning conservation of our heritage. The meeting felt this required careful thought so your Executive Committee will work on this.

We deleted our little used junior grade membership and added student and corporate memberships instead. These members have the same voting status as ordinary members and receive the same printed material benefits. It opens up the possibility of those joining us as students staying with the Society throughout their adult life. Corporate membership will involve two-way conversations with local organisations and improve our influence over local issues. We also changed our 'end of life' clause to something less prescriptive and open to debate about the future of our assets.

Since the AGM in March, our Leatherhead Museum has re-opened with some new and updated displays. We have also begun work on recruiting a firm of surveyors to follow through from the last building survey and a contractor to monitor progress. We are grateful to Rod Wilson, our expert who is also a Society member.

Finally, while celebrating our successful recruitment of some new officers for roles within the Executive Committee, we are still seeking a volunteer to handle our book production and sales needs. This ideally involves both wholesale and retail activities as well as taking the lead on digital layout work. The tasks require an interest in managing our stock of books, liaising with and invoicing local stockists, and making deliveries.

Much of the role is automated. If you or anyone you know might be interested, do please contact us.

NEWS FROM THE FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM

By GWEN HOAD

At the AGM of the Friends of the Museum on 25 April, we were very sorry to say goodbye to Alan Pooley as a member of the committee as he has resigned as Museum Manager. We hope Lorraine Spindler will be able to join us from time to time as she takes on that role. There is a lot for her to do so she will need several helpers for this task.

Otherwise the current committee remains as before and was duly re-elected. They are Judy Wilson, Hon Secretary; Gwen Hoad, Hon Treasurer and Membership Secretary; Debby Humphreys, Stewards Secretary; Diana Rogers; Lin Hampson; and Robin Christian. The last four are also involved with school visits and the craft days. We still have no Chairman and desperately need a volunteer for this post. We also have room for more committee members.

Some 40 members of the Friends are L&DLHS members and another 18 are Friends only. Our main activity is organising the stewards rota which Debby does efficiently and patiently. Currently there are 40 stewards but the number fluctuates. Not all are members of the Friends but we encourage them to join.

We feel the important thing is to have them stewarding in the Museum and they are covered by the Society's insurance. Stewards will receive the L&DLHS Newsletter in future to keep them in touch with what is going on. As well as the stewards, the Friends include the back-room boys and girls who work behind the scenes in the Museum.

Both Alan Pooley and Doug Hollingsworth continue to be part of the Monday morning working party. Bob and Janet Lines have joined the team and have done sterling work assisting Lorraine in



various ways. David Williams is a regular member of the team and no job is too tricky for him to tackle. He can usually be seen with a paintbrush on Mondays.

Sonia Jeabit takes pride in her work - gardening and vitally providing the workers with tea or coffee and biscuits. Laurence Naylor beavers away in the Priory basement checking its artefacts. Listing artefacts as long as anyone can remember is David Atkinson, and I also include myself, looking after the shop and checking the stock and takings on Mondays.

Craft days are organised by Robin Christian and his team and will take place this year on 11, 18 and 25 August. The education team will handle visits from Fetcham Primary School on 11 and 13 July. Julia Lack remains an active member of that team. The stewards' social in December was well attended and Lorraine also arranged an event for stewards in the Museum garden on 1 April.

After the AGM, John Rowley, L&DLHS Chairman, outlined aspirations for repairs at Hampton Cottage. After coming surveys it will be possible to estimate the eventual cost of any repairs and then to decide how to raise the necessary finance.

Members present reiterated that part of the Museum's attraction is the building itself and it should be preserved. John also discussed other efficiency measures including dealing with a backlog of emails.

The Friends wish to thank everyone who supports the Museum, even just by paying their subscription. Above all the stewards without whom the museum could not exist.

Museum celebrates 70 years of the L&DLHS

Local artist Cathy Brett was guest of honour at the Museum's re-opening ceremony on 8 April, presenting a stunning array of new exhibits that she had created personally to mark the Society's 70th anniversary.

Cathy cut the ceremonial ribbon and received a bouquet of thanks from Curator Lorraine Spindler.

The new exhibition focuses on events seen and recorded over the last 70 years, from flooding to drought to food tasting, pop music and the Olympics. The River Mole is central to the time-line.

The World War 2 exhibition presenting Hampton Cottage on VE Day in 1945 has also been

1947 India wins independence and The Leatherhead & District Historical Society is born



Displays recall major events in the district over the past 70 years, left and above, including the notorious weather forecast ignoring the Great Storm of 1987 and memories of pop stars in the district in the 1970s and Princess Diana in the 1980s.

enhanced. It recalls when residents Hilda and Frank Hollis would have heard the wonderful news on their ‘government standard’ wireless set that the war in Europe was finally over. The room is packed full of contemporary items and memorabilia from the time, now meticulously cleaned and listed as part of a special research project to feature in a new book about life at Hampton Cottage between 1910 and 1948.

The late Pearl Kew, a local resident since the 1930s, knew Hilda personally and before her recent death, donated photos of herself to the museum, wearing costumes that Hilda had created. These are displayed among other memorabilia of the Hollis and Kew families.

Over the winter the Victorian kitchen on the ground floor of the cottage has been carefully re-decorated and its artefacts cleaned, re-displayed and labelled. One invaluable new addition is a map of the entire local area under glass on the desk in the front room. This will



Left: Cathy Brett with Peter Snell of Barton's Bookshop, a major outlet for our books. Below left: Lorraine shows Cathy's clever new 'Curate Your Own Model Museum' facility. Bottom left: Victorian kitchen. Below: Hilda Hollis's dress designs, donated by the late Pearl Kew. Bottom: The room when Frank and Hilda heard about VE Day.



make it easier for volunteers who manage the museum to answer questions from the public about locations of buildings and other historic points of interest.

The Museum is now open until December on every Thursday and Friday from 1-4pm and on Saturdays from 10am-4pm.

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

5 July, 6pm: Meeting at Fetcham Park House. Vivien White will talk on '*Mr Moore's Fine House on a Hill' and his splendid gardens at Fetcham Park.*

9 August, 10.30am: Visit to Ashtead Park for a tour led by Pat Jenkins following her talk in April on its history. This will be an outdoors tour excluding the former Manor House, which is being refurbished.

8 September, 3pm: Bill Whitman will talk at St Nicolas Church, Bookham, on the origins of the Howards of Effingham and their involvement with the Spanish Armada of 1588. (Heritage Open Days)

9 September: Walking tour of Ashtead led by Huw Jenkins.
(Heritage Open Days)

15 September, 7.30pm: Tony Matthews will give a presentation at the Letherhead Institute on the Society's recently introduced online oral history service.

20 October, 7.30pm: Chris Stagg will talk at the Letherhead Institute about local popular musicians and recording in the 1950s.

17 November: TV personality Bamber Gascoigne will speak at Leatherhead Theatre on West Horsley Place and the new opera house.

8 December: Christmas Miscellany of short talks by members at the Letherhead Institute.

Details of activities will be posted on the Society's website and announced at meetings. Except for those taking place elsewhere, all monthly meetings are normally held in the Abraham Dixon Hall of the Letherhead Institute, starting at 7.30 with coffee for the 8pm talk. Visitors are always welcome.

LECTURE

How Science can tell us about the use of Land

In January, forensic ecologist and botanist Professor Patricia Wiltshire described how science could provide information about past environments and climate. DEREK RENN reports.

Patricia Wiltshire's particular speciality is palynology, the study of pollen grains and other spores. These can be extracted from peat, lake sediments and buried soils, identified and quantified, and then used to build up profiles of biological communities. This enables an understanding of the landscapes of the past, and the lifestyles of the people living in them.

She is also a former environmental archaeologist, a field involving many scientific disciplines – biology, botany, geology, mycology, and statistics among them. Soil analysis is important in environmental archaeology because vegetation is so affected by it and - as animals rely on plants - the nature of soil can affect the character of the whole biological community.

Professor Wiltshire described various soils and their parent rocks and outlined methods used to analyse them. Soils are developed from underlying rocks and drift material left by glaciers. Knowledge of soil was essential to ancient peoples because of their reliance on both wild and crop plants.

A soil may be a loam, sand, clay, podsol, rendzina or even transitional between these extremes. She outlined methods for analysing them, particularly the way in which former activity of earthworms can be detected in a buried land surface through micro-morphological analysis. Earthworms have specific requirements so it is possible to predict the kind of soil represented by an ancient buried layer and, thus, to some extent, the potential vegetation at a site.

She showed the range of organisms used in environmental archaeology, including wild mammals, flies, lice, mites, ticks, and soil micro-fauna. We also saw pictures of the microscopic and macroscopic parts of plants that provide clues to the past. These included pollen, spores, diatoms, foraminifera and fungi, as well as seeds, fruits, wood, and even plant hairs.



*Left: Mosses, such as *Sphagnum*, are used to staunch bleeding, as toilet paper and as padding.*

Below: The former activity of earth-worms can be detected through micro-morphological analysis.



She explained dendrochronology, the study of tree rings. This technique is largely used for dating timbers, especially in old buildings, but is also used

to determine past events such as hurricanes, bad winters, volcanic eruptions, and even pollution and air chemistry in the past. She told us about the study of pollen grains and spores, and the way it has been used to give very detailed information about the history of vegetation going back to the last Glacial period.

Vegetation gives clues to the climate in the past. The nature of landscape and archaeological settlements have been worked out in detail in many parts of the world by analysing fragments of preserved plant material, pollen and spores.

Professor Wiltshire told us how plants were put to good use by previous peoples. Mosses, such as *Sphagnum*, were used to staunch bleeding, as toilet paper and as padding. Some ferns, such as bracken, were used as bedding, roofing, and as a source of potash for making gunpowder and soap. Others such as nettle and hemp were woven into fabrics and to make rope.

Her past archaeological work had included projects on Hadrian's Wall. Before the Romans built a turf wall near Birdoswald in the far north of England, they cleared the mixed woodland, particularly of oak. Their impact on the terrain around the wall varied because at a fort just a mile away, the landscape was very different.



Left: Professor Wiltshire's archaeological work has included Hadrian's Wall. This was built after the Romans cleared local woodland, particularly of oak, impacting the adjacent terrain.

At Stanway, near Colchester, implements found in the grave of a Roman 'druidic' doctor had included a vessel with a plug in its spout. This had contained pollen of mugwort as well as that from plants normally exploited by bees. The pollen evidence had shown that the doctor was using mugwort to treat his patient for intestinal worms and, because the infusion was so bitter, had added honey as a sweetener - hence, the pollen of bee plants. A pit had accumulated sediment in Saxon times and that pollen analysis showed it had been used for retting hemp to obtain the plant fibres.

She also introduced work carried out by Professor Martin Waller on Ashtead Common. A series of cores from the sediments in an infilled pit near the Roman buildings revealed a fascinating sequence of vegetation change.

When the Romans abandoned the pit, the surroundings were much as they are today, with oaks, grasses, and bracken dominating that part of the Common. There was evidence that local shrubs and trees had been used as a resource but from around the year 1200, the shrubs or under-wood were being so severely exploited that there was obviously a shortage of wood. That was when pollarding of the oaks was allowed and the area was managed as wood pasture. The pit was completely filled in by about 1850 so there was no more environmental information for the site after that date.

Responding to questions, Professor Wiltshire said palynology was hard work, involving the identification and counting of thousands of pollen grains and spores in order to get a good picture of past vegetation. This was also true with forensic cases. She answered questions on the forensic aspects of her work over the last 24 years, regretting the decline of expertise available to archaeological units and the now limited opportunities to learn her disciplines which were both powerful and useful.

LECTURE

The Birth, Life and Death of the River Mole

In February, Professor Richard Selley, Head of Geology at Imperial College, London, (right) drew the biggest audience for many years to one of our monthly talks. His lecture to a packed house also drew many questions afterwards. DEREK RENN reports.



A record size audience poured into the Leatherhead Institute's Abraham Dixon Hall to hear Professor Richard Selley, one of Britain's leading geologists, tell the story of the birth, life and death of the River Mole.

It was the February meeting of the Leatherhead & District Local History Society and the hall was packed as the audience listened to Professor Selley, Head of Geology at London's Imperial College, explain how the river was formed, its links with worrying swallow holes, and finally how one day it will disappear altogether.

Professor Selley was born and brought up at Home Farm, Effingham. He rose to his position at Imperial College and is a leading authority on the application of geology to petroleum exploration and production. Demonstrating his local credentials he began his



Packed Abraham Dixon Hall hears about the fate of the River Mole.

talk by showing a pint milk bottle labelled Curtis Dairies, his great-grandmother's family firm.

He explained that the rocks of south-east England were layers of Wealden clay, greensand, gault clay, chalk, London clay, and Ice Age sands and gravels. After tectonic plate movement forced the stratum upward about 60 million years ago, the chalk dome collapsed and the River Mole was one of the streams draining the Weald, passing through a gap in the North Downs at Box Hill.

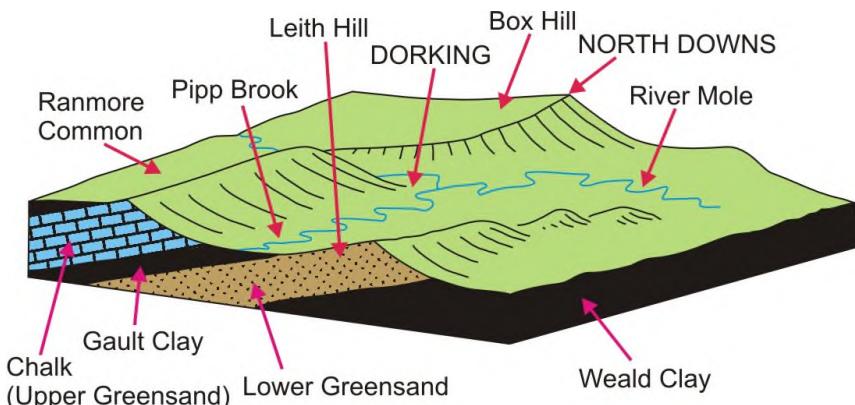
Lateral dry valleys like Juniper Bottom and Polesden developed, with two gravel river terraces. Local water supplies came from springs fed by rainwater percolating through the chalk. He repeated a local yarn that a duck once placed in the River Mole at Mickleham emerged at the Fetcham millpond, surviving its submerged experience but without its feathers.

The earliest name recorded for the River Mole was Muleseg, dating from the year 672 AD. In the 11th century *Domesday Book* it was called Y Melyn. Camden's *Britannia* (1586) first recorded the name Mole, attributing it to the river's habit of apparently disappearing underground between Dorking and Norbury, and so it was shown on maps for nearly 200 years.

Rocque's county map of 1752 was the first to show a continuous stream-bed for the River Mole. This phenomenon was caused by rainwater percolating through acidic soils into the chalk stratum, dissolving it into caverns which normally remain full of water, although in dry weather like the prolonged drought of summer 1976 they act as a drainage sump.

When the Mickleham by-pass was built, some swallow holes caused by this dissolution of chalk had to be concreted over. Many of them were studied by the Juniper Hall Field Studies Centre while others have been identified as darker green areas on aerial photographs. In 1937 there were press reports of a 60-foot oak tree suddenly rotating and vanishing down a swallow hole. Another hole 200 feet deep opened just in front of a witness in 1911.

Professor Selley drew attention to the mystery chamber at the bottom of Dorking's famous South Street caves, where a rusty coloured tidemark indicated the river's palaeo-water table, demonstrating its fluctuations over time.



Geophantasmogram of the River Mole where it cuts through the North Downs. From: Selley R.C. 2004. The Box Hill & Mole Valley Book of Geology (c) The Friends of Box Hill

Alarmingly, Professor Selley forecast that the river's future was likely to be far shorter than its past, although its demise could be expected after that of everyone in the audience. Rising sea levels were a sign of dramatic geological change. Indicative of this was the number of times in each of the last three decades that the Thames Barrier had had to be closed. During the 1980s a mere four times but 35 times in the 1990s and 75 times during the first decade of the new millennium.

It was Professor Selley himself who originally identified the site of Denbies as ideal for a vineyard. However with climate change, the varieties of grapes grown had altered over the last 30 years in response to rising temperatures.

Answering questions from the audience, he confirmed that the Fetcham spring water was drinkable at source but photosynthesis turned the surface water green. The oxbow lake near Westhumble was not a natural feature but the result of human action to reduce flooding. The river itself had been canalized near Slyfield House and elsewhere for mill races. The man-made cave systems in the upper greensand at Dorking and Reigate might be interconnected. The mineral Epsom salts existed in a spring on Ashtead Common.



Above: River Mile dried out in 1976. Photo by A E Tims. Below: A traction engine braves local swallow holes 80 years ago.

PLUGGING SWALLOW HOLES BESIDE THE MICKLEHAM BYPASS. 1937



LECTURE

A History of Ashtead Park



In April, Pat Jenkins (shown left), archivist of the City of London Freemen's School, told us about its home, the 16th century Ashtead Park. DEREK RENN reports.

Who better to tell us the story of Ashtead Park than Pat Jenkins? Originally a pupil at the City of London Freemen's School, then a teacher and author of a history of its first 150 years, she is now its archivist, collecting documents, memories and memorabilia from past pupils in two basement rooms.

Started in 1854 as the City of London Freemen's Orphan School in Brixton, the school moved to Ashtead in 1925, dropped the word 'orphan' and admitted fee-paying and girl pupils. Mrs Jenkins once met one of the first pupils to arrive there, recalling his exhilaration at travelling on an open-topped bus through the suburbs to the open Surrey countryside.

A fragment of the Tudor manor house survives in St Giles' churchyard wall. Samuel Pepys the diarist visited family connections in the village. In 1680 Sir Robert Howard (above right) bought the manor from a distant relative and built a house on a new site with a lake, enclosing the park with a wall and stocking it with deer. Sadly, the boat-house and horse-powered well-house have now gone. So too the great centuries old wych elm which eventually had to be felled. An avenue of wonderful beeches suffered badly in the 1987 great storm.

We saw a 1689 view of the house with many windows and chimneys. Sir Robert entertained three kings there - Charles II, James II and William III - and the iron park gates were erected in honour of the last. Shown above right, Lady Diana Howard, his daughter-in-law, had





almshouses for six poor widows built on the Epsom Road. They are still there today.

Richard Bagot married the estate's heiress and had the new three-storey house shown above, designed by Bonomi and built by Samuel Wyatt around 1790. A century later, Sir Thomas Lucas, builder of the Royal Albert Hall in Kensington, added a one-storey wing to each side of the house and created an Italian garden with balustrade. A sundial in front of the house is listed by Historic England and time capsules are buried in the garden.

When Mary Greville Howard died in 1877, the Howard line in Ashtead came to an end. She was loved in the village, having created a new school and extended the almshouses. A memorial to her shown left remains today. The North Lodge was used for a time to educate the best scholars, who acted as unpaid gatekeepers.

The mother of Pantia Ralli, last resident lord of the manor, gave him Ashtead Park as a wedding present. He

installed electric lighting and had Teddy Bear Cottage, shown right, built in the stables for the chauffeur of his eight cars. This now contains school classrooms.

Mrs Jenkins showed us pictures of the game larder, fitted with



heavy doors to shield its grisly contents from the gaze of refined visitors, and of the main house's interior, with its ornamental plaster work and columns. The Old Library contained a triangular paper stand brought from the school at Brixton and was once filmed for one of comedian Benny Hill's shows.

Among questions after her talk, one audience member asked who was responsible for the upkeep of the Mary Howard Memorial Column now on the A24. The Society later discovered that Mole Valley Council is responsible for the Memorial and owns the land.

In response to other questions, Mrs Jenkins defined the term 'foundationers' as those given free education. She said the school was administered jointly with Christ's Hospital at Horsham and the Boys and Girls Schools still in the City of London. The music department catered for almost every instrument and also had banks of computers that were used for composition of new works.

A STUDY IN 19TH CENTURY LITERACY

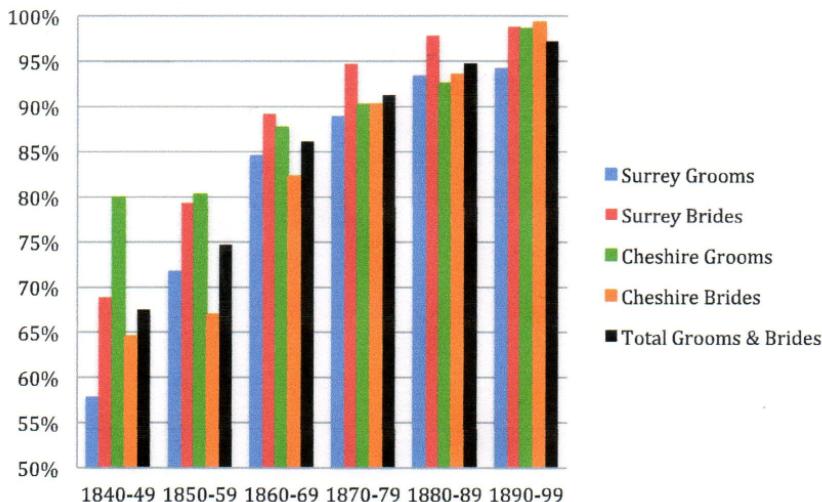
JUDITH WITTER of Bookham U3A studied literacy levels in 19th century England using her family history research skills. The one place where accessible documents were available in date order were parish church marriage records.

In Victorian times people revealed their literacy level by either signing their name on their marriage certificate or marking it with a cross. I decided to research literacy by looking at wedding records in a study of seven parish churches in two different areas of England.

I looked at four local Surrey parishes: St Mary & St Nicholas, Leatherhead; St Nicolas, Great Bookham; All Saints, Little Bookham; and St Mary's, Fetcham. I then looked at three parishes in Cheshire: St James, Christleton; St Albans, Tattenhall; and St Mary's, Coddington.

Using the ability to sign your marriage certificate with your own name or only mark it with a cross has some limitations for measuring historic literacy levels. Not all members of the population married and most brides and grooms were between 20 and 30 years of age so levels of literacy in older people were largely excluded. Furthermore,

Literacy Rates of Brides & Grooms



those who chose to marry often excluded the poorest members in a parish as they could not afford to marry. The study also excluded those who married outside the Church of England.

Another problem with parish registers was that some signatures looked like those of a child learning to write and might barely show literacy at all. Nevertheless I included them among the literate. Those who signed with a cross or mark I counted as illiterate although reading was usually taught before writing so this too was inexact.

Education provision clearly affected literacy rates. Upper classes and those who could afford to pay generally made sure that their children were educated and literate. This was either at home with a tutor or governess or at a boarding school. But education for the poor dictated literacy levels among the lower classes.

Before the 19th century, upper classes worried that mass literacy might result in revolution. As attitudes changed, schooling for the labouring class was considered a safeguard against extreme poverty. Education Acts in 1806 and 1833 provided grants to parishes to educate the poor. In 1834 the Poor Law Commission made provision for children in workhouses to be educated but what they received was very basic.

Before 1870, there were 200 of Lord Shaftsbury's Ragged Schools across Britain and boards and local charitable provision of education for the lower classes. For instance in 1770 in Tattenhall, Samuel Peploe made provision for 18 poor boys to be educated in reading, writing and arithmetic. There was a John Sellers Charity school founded in 1779 in Christleton for poor children.

Leatherhead had a free school in 1596 but by 1818 a day school had been set up for boys. In addition, the vicar in Leatherhead ran a Sunday school for 80 boys and 70 girls, paid for by subscription. In 1838, the vicar of Leatherhead established its first National School, which was extended in 1839 to provide for girls. Ten years later this admitted boys and girls from the age of three to seven and a separate infants school was established in 1865.

There were dame schools in most areas but these were not registered and in many cases amounted to little more than childcare by elderly women in their homes. The breakthrough in education came in 1870 when elected school boards could levy a local rate to build schools for those up to the age of 10. In 1880 elementary school for both sexes was made compulsory.

This is a small study of 1932 marriages during the 60-year period from 1840–99. The literacy table reveals the results and shows overall the literacy level between 1840 and 1849 was 67%, so one-third of the population could not then write their name. There is a steady rise in literacy, which reaches 99% by the 1890s.

One must subtract some 25 years from each date to consider when those marrying were born and remember that the poorest, if educated at all, were probably only schooled from the age of five to 10. The national increase in education from 1870 only impacted those born from 1865. In this study this national change should impact the results for the 1880-89 and 1890-99 periods.

What we do see is a shift in literacy levels in the 1860s, largely the result of schooling for those born between 1830 and 1840. Local education was therefore very important in the levels of literacy. The bar chart on Page 21 illustrates the levels of literacy of brides and grooms in Surrey and Cheshire. Grooms have a high level of literacy (80%) in Cheshire even in the 1840s, much higher than their local brides whose literacy levels are in line with the overall average.

In contrast, during the same 1840s period, Surrey grooms have a low to average literacy level but their brides a higher level.

Tattenhall was isolated in the 18th century because the stagecoach did not go into the village itself. Employment opportunities were mostly confined to those within the village. When the Chester Canal between Chester and Nantwich opened in 1772 it brought more trading possibilities for the local villages. However the biggest change in employment opportunity came with the arrival of the railway which increased demand for literate employees.

Railway stations on the Chester-Crewe line opened at Tattenhall and Waverton, near Christleton, in 1840. A branch line from Tattenhall to Whitchurch opened in 1872. In such rural areas of Cheshire it is possible that increased mechanisation of agriculture brought a realisation that literacy was important for future employment and upward mobility. Tattenhall's population dropped from 1433 in 1871 to 1201 in 1901. Mechanisation meant fewer jobs so many people left the village, assisted by the increased available transport.

Leatherhead's first railway station opened in 1859 (Epsom and Leatherhead Railway Company) and the second in 1867 (London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Company). Bookham station opened in 1885. The railway came later to the Surrey villages in this study which could explain the early lag in literacy levels. By 1860 there was little difference between Cheshire and Surrey.

Some interesting facts emerged. It was unusual to have more than one marriage on any one day and in some years there were few or no weddings at all. But Leatherhead had more than any of the other parishes studied and actually had four weddings on 11 June 1898.

The maximum number in one year for the Surrey churches showed St Nicolas, Great Bookham with 12 weddings in 1893 while St Mary's, Fetcham had six in 1893 and 1899. St Mary and St Nicholas, Leatherhead had many more marriages and the year with the largest number of weddings in each of the 10-year periods was 12 in 1849, 10 in 1855, 20 in 1865, 18 in 1874 and 1876, 23 in 1885, and 36 in 1898.

Other differences were also noted in examining the records. In Tattenhall, both brides and grooms sometimes had 'reputed father' recorded on their marriage certificates. Their mothers were therefore shown

as spinsters at the times of their birth, showing illegitimacy among either brides or grooms.

Such details in the marriage records may have been because in earlier times the Tattenhall birth, marriage and death records were based on the Dade system. This included more information than usual, including grandparents on both sides. The Tattenhall rector might therefore have known more about the origins of couples in his parish and wished this to be recorded for purposes of accuracy.

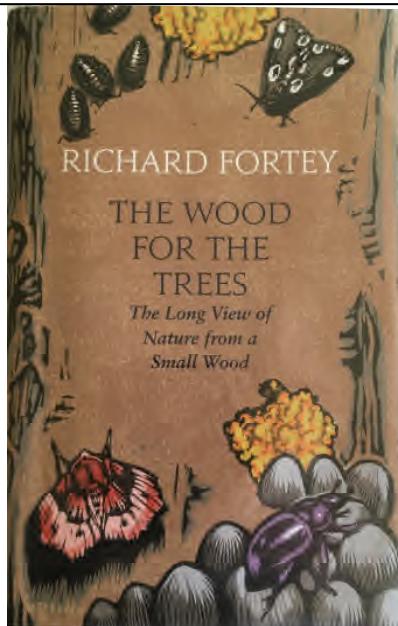
This small study shows the predictable increase in literacy levels as provision of education increased. For some reason, Cheshire grooms on average married brides who were less literate than themselves while the opposite was true in Surrey. However, by the end of the century this had changed with virtually all couples showing the ability to read and write.

BOOK REVIEW

FRANK HASLAM reviews *The Wood for the Trees* by Richard Fortey

Richard Fortey retired as Senior Palaeontologist at the Natural History Museum in 2006. He is an award winning author, was President of the Geological Society of London for its bicentennial year in 2007, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS).

He has won prestigious prizes for science communication and writing as well as many distinguished awards for his scientific work. In recent years he has presented several series on BBC 4 including *Survivors: Nature's Indestructible Creatures* (2012); *The Secret Life of Rock Pools* (2013);



Fossil Wonderlands: Nature's Hidden Treasures (2014);

The Magic of Mushrooms (2014); and *Nature's Wonderlands: Islands of Evolution* (2016).

I really enjoyed reading his 2016 book *THE WOOD FOR THE TREES: The Long View of Nature from a Small Wood*. This biography of a beech-and-bluebell wood through diverse moods and changing seasons combines stunning natural history with the ancient history of the countryside to tell the full story of the British landscape.

'The woods are the great beauty of this country... A fine forest-like beech wood far more beautiful than anything else which we have seen in its vicinity' is how John Stuart Mill described a small patch of beech-and bluebell woodland, buried deeply in the Chiltern Hills and now owned by Richard Fortey.

Drawing upon a lifetime of scientific expertise and abiding love of nature, Fortey uses his small wood to tell a wider story of the ever-changing British landscape, human influence on the countryside over many centuries, and the vital interactions between flora, fauna and fungi.

The trees provide a majestic stage for woodland animals and plants to reveal their own stories. Fortey presents his wood as an interwoven collection of different habitats rich in species. His attention ranges from the beech and cherry trees that dominate the wood to the flints underfoot; the red kites and woodpeckers that soar overhead; the lichens, mosses and liverworts decorating the branches as well as the myriad species of spiders, moths, beetles and crane-flies. The 300 species of fungi identified in the wood capture his attention as much as familiar deer, shrews and dormice. All this within a framework of the history of the place and its people

The book is filled with details of living animals and plants, charting the passage of the seasons, visits by fellow enthusiasts; the play of light between branches; the influence of geology; and how woodland influences history, architecture and industry.

On every page he shows how an intimate study of one small wood can reveal so much about the natural world and demonstrates his relish for the incomparable pleasures of discovery. You will learn much about British history and nature and perhaps like me find it wonderfully absorbing. It is in Leatherhead Library.

WHEN CINEMAS WERE TOPS

TONY MATTHEWS tells of the rise, fall and resurrection of our local cinemas. From a talk to Bookham U3A Social History Group.



On 21 February 1896, 54 people paid up to a shilling to watch moving photographic images projected on to a large screen at London's Polytechnic Institution in Regent Street. They were Britain's first ever cinema audience. Some panicked as the train they saw moving on screen appeared to be coming right at them but the new cinema's popularity can be seen from the picture above a few years later.

Films continued to be shown there for the next 84 years until the last exhibitor left in 1980. But 35 years later, following a three-year £6 million restoration project, it reopened in May 2015 with all of its Art Deco features, domed ceiling and 1936 vintage organ back in place at what is now Westminster University's Regent Street campus.

If ever there was a case of a major entertainment form facing demise but bouncing back against the odds this must be it. The story of this historic cinema mirrors that of the industry as a whole.

Until the 1950s, moving pictures were largely confined to the cinema screen as few people had TVs. Live shows and sport attracted huge numbers but for habitual weekly glamour, escapism, fantasy and news, the cinema was king.

Cinema reached its zenith in Britain at the end of World War 2.



Left: Leatherhead's two earlier cinemas, the Victoria Hall (above) and the Crescent (below).



Yet just 40 years later by 1985 it was the industry's nadir. By then the number of cinemas had crashed, films were largely aimed just at youth audiences, and home video had arrived to help speed up the decline. It looked as if the point of no return was about to be reached.

Yet since then, multiplex cinemas have arrived, annual admissions have risen again and like the now all too popular zombie, cinema seems to have made a comeback!

In 2017, cinemas once again play a role in communities across the country, although they may look a bit

different. Our own Leatherhead Theatre is very much a cinema rather than just the live performance venue it was when opened by Dame Sybil Thorndike in 1969. Dorking Halls and the Odeons in Epsom or Guildford are also nearby.

Just over a century ago the earliest cinemas were mostly just shop conversions or simple rectangular rooms, often fleapits. But Charlie Chaplin, the Keystone Cops and others transformed expectations during World War I and then everything changed. When the talkies arrived from Hollywood in 1928, there was a huge surge of new cinema building and they became far more elaborate. The Art Deco movie palaces of the 1920s and 1930s often seated not hundreds but

up to 2000 or 3000 people, with fantasy interiors styled after Egyptian temples or Gothic cathedrals.

The biggest were built in London and other metropolitan areas with large populations but how was this represented in our part of Surrey?

Leatherhead's first cinema was the Victoria Hall in the High Street which staged a live performance of *The Pirates of Penzance* in 1907, among the first ever productions by the Leatherhead Operatic Society. By 1914 it had become a cinema known as the Grand Theatre with some 550 seats. Around 1921, it was re-named Picture House and the seating was reduced to 380. In August 1940 it was re-named yet again, this time as St George's Cinema to match the national wartime mood. After the war it became the



*Top: Original Odeon, Epsom (1937-1971).
Above: Embassy, Dorking (1938-1973).
Left: Plaza, Guildford (1910-1956).*

Ace Cinema but was closed by early 1948. Just two years later in 1950 the building was taken over by the Under Thirty Group of young professional actors who later moved to the Thorndike when that opened in 1969. Today the one-time Victoria Hall is now just a retail outlet, a barber's shop.

Leatherhead Theatre's cinema roots go back some way too. Back in 1939 it became the site of the Crescent Cinema, seating 1282 people. It was a real cinema of the era with an Art Deco design and equipped with a Hammond organ. It had a stage 30 feet deep, a proscenium 40 feet wide, and two dressing rooms. Unlike many cinemas of the day it belonged to none of the dominant chains - ABC, Odeon and Gaumont - and was independently operated.

But that didn't protect it against the post-war national trend of decline and it eventually closed in 1966. Bingo failed to save it and Leatherhead Council bought the building. Major alterations to the stage, the frontage and the auditorium followed before it emerged for the re-opening by Sybil Thorndike in 1969 with 530 seats and a widely admired new theatre design. But it was 26 years before it began screening films as well as live performances and the management company then went bust in 1997. After a four-year break it reopened as the Leatherhead Theatre in 2001 and despite continuing serious financial challenges it is now very much our local cinema. The building was given Grade 2 listing in 1999.

Local cinema-goers could always travel a bit further to see the films of their choice. The Embassy cinema in Dorking High Street opened with 1290 seats in 1938. It was built as a Gaumont cinema but was soon sold and renamed the Embassy, surviving until 1973. The building was demolished ten years later. Dorking's entertainment facilities go back a long way. Major concerts were performed at Dorking Halls as far back as the 1920s but that has only been a cinema, as well as a venue for live performances, since the late 1990s and only since 2011 has it had a 3D cinema and three screens.

Epsom and Guildford both had cinemas long before World War 2. Epsom's first was the Cinema Royal in the High Street, dating back to 1910. That had started with just 220 seats, later enlarged to 560. The Capitol Granada cinema opened in Church Street in 1929. The first Odeon Epsom opened in 1937 near the clock-tower with a



typical Art Deco auditorium and seating for 1016 in the stalls and 418 in the circle.

Redevelopment saw the demise of the old Cinema Royal but its owner went on to build a new 1462-seat cinema, the Rembrandt, at Ewell, opening in 1938. After the war this became the ABC Ewell which survived in various guises right up to 1998. When bingo replaced afternoon matinees in 1961 the die was cast for the Odeon Epsom. The Capitol Granada had already closed the previous year and while films were soon back at the Odeon, dwindling audiences meant its demise ten years later. It was replaced by Sainsbury's, itself now replaced by another building. Yet like the veritable zombie, the name Odeon Epsom simply refused to die. It is back today in the town centre, inviting those "fanatical about film" to its doors.

Another Odeon Guildford had also opened in 1935 with seating for 1145 in the stalls and 478 in the circle. That was converted to a triple-screen cinema in 1973 with a fourth screen added in 1989. It only lasted seven years, closing in 1996 when a new eight-screen Odeon multiplex opened in the town. Once again a cinema named Odeon was demolished in 2002, even as film fans flocked to a successor with twice as many screens.

Yet many other old cinema buildings around the country escaped the bulldozers and even if no longer operational, by 2010 around 120 of them had received listed status.

In 1933 the average person in Britain went to the cinema 20 times year. By 1946 that had risen to 34 times a year. Many people went more frequently still, balancing out the uninterested or disadvantaged who did not. During the same period, annual cinema attendances had increased from a total of 903 million to an extraordinary peak of 1635 million. In the immediate post-war Britain of 1946, an average 4.48 million people could be found watching the silver screen every single day of the week.

After that peak year, apart from a blip in 1948, annual admissions declined steadily. But in 1952, four in ten adults and half of all children still went to the cinema at least once a week. Daily admissions still averaged around 3.7 million and the average patron still went to the cinema 27 times a year. People spent over £100 million on tickets in that year, far more than on any other form of entertainment.

Two years later, the *Kinematograph Yearbook* for 1954 showed there were 4682 cinemas in mainland Britain with a total of 4,221,200 seats. The largest could seat anything up to 3000 people.

Branding became ever more important. For one of the two biggest circuits, familiar cinema names such as Ritz, Regal, Rialto and so on were dropped in favour of a common ABC name wherever-the-cinema-happened-to-be. The Rank Organisation had already adopted the same policy for its Odeon and Gaumont names. But theatres everywhere were either closing down altogether or being converted for bingo, bowling and live music or comedy performances. New cinema openings involved conversions into twin or triple outlets as smaller auditoria, offering wider choice, were also expected to cater for fewer numbers.

By the start of the 1970s the future of big screen entertainment itself seemed in question. Early experiments with 3D, Cinerama, Todd AO and other cinematic innovations had come and gone within a few years and TV now appeared close to delivering the final coup de grace. Yet the past quarter century has seen cinema admissions steadily rising once again as audience tastes have changed and the appeal of watching films in public on a huge screen has grown.

Watching films at home can never match a public audience. There's nothing like eating ice-cream, popcorn, or hotdogs amid the crowd that hushes as the lights go down and the curtains open.

ORAL HISTORY: EILEEN PIERCE AND HAZEL BROWN



Sisters Mrs Eileen Pierce (above left) and Mrs Hazel Brown (above right) were brought up in Leatherhead where their father ran a well known record shop. Both worked for Ronsons and were active in the company's amateur theatre productions. They were interviewed on 21 November 2016.

Eileen: My place of birth was Rose Hill Nursing Home at Dorking, my full name is Eileen Margaret Pearce and my date of birth was 9 October 1944. My parents' names were Alice Lillian Hawkins and Alfred Louis Hawkins. My mother was from a very large family of originally 13 children but only eight survived, and my father was the second son in a family of four. He had three sisters.

Their first home was over the Oddfellows Hall in Bridge Street where my father belonged to the Grand Order of Oddfellows and they lived in the flat above the shop.

The earliest memory I have of my father working was when he bought a shop in North Street which started off as an electrical

shop. He sold and rented out radios. Then he started selling records, the large 78 rpm records, and found that this was going to be the up and coming thing. So he sold his shop, moved into the High Street, and reopened it as a record shop.

The shop stocked all types of records. This was nearly into the 1960s when the pop scene really took off. On a Saturday afternoon you could hear the music blasting out of the shop which was absolutely packed with teenagers buying the latest discs. The other chap that worked in the shop with my father knew everything about classical music. So the public would walk into the shop, hum a tune and either my dad or his assistant would know it and they could then purchase the record.

The first school I went to until I was six years old was Fetcham Infants School. I was only there a short time when the family moved to Leatherhead so I then went to Poplar Road School. Because I failed my 11 Plus I then went to Leatherhead Secondary School along Kingston Road and I absolutely hated. But I was fortunate in being allowed to take my 13 Plus and then transferred to Dilston Road School which had only been open a few years and was absolutely super.

Poplar Road School was an infants school with outside toilets that smelt absolutely terrible and were freezing in the winter. The head-mistress was a very stern lady and at the drop of a hat would have us down on our knees at the local church. I think I spent as much time in the church as I did in the school.

My very first job was a Saturday job working in a dress shop called Collette's in Church Street. They gave me a job ironing the clothes that came in. I wasn't allowed to serve customers and for that they paid me a nice crisp ten shilling note. I then left school and went to work in the offices right opposite Ronson Products. I went there as a junior in the wages department, making the tea, doing the odd jobs, and worked my way up from there.

Ronson's offices were in Church Street next to the cinema. It was then decided to move to Randalls Road where the main factory was. We all dreaded this but the best thing for me was when we moved there I found my husband was working there. From that, friendship developed and we were married for 35 years. His name was Ron

and he worked in the work study department there. He stayed there until Ronson's went into liquidation in 1980.

In my lifetime I think the Leatherhead town centre has greatly improved, mainly because it is now pedestrianised. Although the old shops were lovely and quite a selection of them, it was almost impossible to stand in the High Street and have a conversation with somebody. It became very dirty and very noisy and the traffic went through the High Street. Although we don't have the variety of shops that we used to have, we still have all the day to day shops for our needs. There are not as many pubs but we do have loads of coffee shops and cafes. I can remember as a teenager going out for the evening and there was absolutely nowhere in Leatherhead where you could get a cup of coffee or something to eat. Now there are so many place to go to, including the coffee shop in the Leatherhead Theatre which makes it a very cosmopolitan town.

Hazel: My full name is Hazel Patricia Brown and I was born on 20 September 1931 over the Oddfellows Hall. My father's family lived in Gravel Hill. My mother came from Hampshire. They met when Mum was working in Leatherhead and their first home was 45 Bridge Street over the Oddfellows Hall.

He was self-employed for a lot of the time. He worked in Moulds in Leatherhead originally where he was a plumber and when they were in Bridge Street he had his own business. But then the war came along and we moved to Kingston and he was working at Hawkers Aircraft which was just up the road from where we lived. We had to sleep in the air raid shelter in the garden every night. I remember they closed the school for a while because of the bombing and we had to collect work to do at home. When the bombing got really bad my mother and I went to live at her original home in Hampshire. Dad used to just come down at weekends. I didn't like the school there because the children had broad Hampshire accents so I was regarded as a foreigner really. There was a lot of bullying.

From Kingston we came to live in Fetcham on the Cannon Court estate where there were lots of shops at that time. I won a scholarship and went to Dorking County Grammar School. The war was still on at that time but it was not as bad as in Kingston.



Former plumber, Lou Hawkins (left) and Bert Swetman in Tower Electrics, North Street. The shop moved to the High Street in 1954. (From Over the Bridge, The Southern Side, 2011)

I worked for my father for a while. He opened a shop in Fetcham for the plumbing business called Surrey Heating Company.

My first proper job was at Wakefield's, an old fashioned drapery store on the corner of Church Street and the High Street. It was very cold because they just had a few radiators. But it was one of the biggest shops in Leatherhead and very well patronised. The first part of the shop that you went into was the fashion department. There was a fitting room by the window which was just curtained off. I don't think ladies realised that when they were changing in this room, in double decker buses going by, people sitting on the top deck would get a wonderful view of them.

I got fed up with working on a Saturday and the magical Ronson's was just up the road. I saw a job advertised for an accounts clerk, no experience necessary. So I said I had a dentist appointment and went off for this interview and fortunately got the job.

I probably worked at Ronson's for about 15 years. They had a block of offices on either side of the Crescent cinema. It was very entertaining because I had a desk by the window so there was plenty going on. We didn't want to go to Randalls Road when they decided to move us down there but we didn't have any choice.

When the operatic society used to do their shows at the cinema they used to leave their hamper and all their bits and pieces, props,

in our office. There was a lovely big hamper full of costumes which we were told we must not touch. So of course at lunchtime we used to get dressed up in these costumes. The only trouble was they dropped face powder over the typewriters and made a bit of a mess.

[**The comedian Arthur Askey, then a household name, made a guest appearance opening a premises in the town.**]

Because my desk was by the window I had a prime view. He was very entertaining, stopping all the traffic as it went by and there was a big Drinkwater lorry that came along. He got out in the middle of the road and said: "Come on Mr Drinkwater." I think it was a bit of a surprise for the driver. And Max Bygraves lived at Pachesham Park and he often used to come by and wave to us. He always seemed to be having trouble with his toaster which he took into Clear's electrical shop to be repaired so we saw quite a lot of him.

[**What do you remember of the Randalls Road site?**]

It was very different when we first moved there because the building wasn't even finished. They hadn't put the hand rails in and it was a bit of a hazard walking on the stairs. I worked in the credit sales department. It was one large office so very open. But the best thing was that quite a lot of people were interested in amateur dramatics so part of the sports association became the Ronson Concert Club. We did pantomimes at Christmas and summer shows going round mainly to mental institutions, entertaining them whether they liked it or not. The pantomimes mostly were very good, though we say it ourselves. They were excellent.

I think we started in the chorus like most entertainers do. The first pantomime that Eileen really had a big part in was *Sinbad the Sailor*. The lady that was playing the part of Sinbad suddenly went sick the week of the show. I didn't fit the costumes but Eileen was smaller than me so the costumes which were lovely fitted her beautifully. In the actual performances I was in the orchestra pit singing and Eileen mimed the songs. Nobody knew really. Eileen was so used to my singing that she knew exactly how to phrase it. Later on I was in *Aladdin* and *Cinderella*. We enjoyed it very much.

Eileen: Ronson Products were an enormous company. While I was working there, a man said they were thinking of forming a Ronson

Concert Club in order to do pantomimes and variety shows. Would you be interested? I jumped at the chance having always been theatre minded. The first pantomime they decided to put on had to be on a fairly small scale as we had never done it before.

We were all amateurs and we put it on at Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall. This was an enormous success as the other workers all longed to see their colleagues making a fool of themselves. This show was so successful we decided the following year that we could seat more people and we could do with a bigger venue. So we took a chance and put the show on at Ebbisham Hall. The next four shows were all at Ebbisham Hall at Epsom.

On the first pantomime they put on there the principal girl went sick and lost her voice. So having been in the previous show as the Fairy Queen, I was asked if I would take the main part. This was on the day of the opening night so very, very short notice. But I agreed to do it.

One of the reasons I agreed was because I had met somebody working in the offices and he played the guitar. We had a small orchestra from some people who worked in the offices - drummer, pianist, double bass player - and Ron was playing the guitar. So I was very anxious to take this part and of course was very popular because I had taken over at short notice and saved the show. It also gave me a chance to get to know the guitarist a lot more and on the closing night of the pantomime when there was a very heavy fall of snow we were standing outside the theatre saying good night and he asked me to marry him. And I did! We married in March 1967.

Hazel: I think that the town has improved a lot over the years, especially with the Swan Centre. I do remember when we lived in Bridge Street all the shops that were up the road. There was one run by Mr Dutt and he had a model ice cream outside the shop which my mother used to try and stop me rushing up to lick. There were a lot of individual grocery shops because women used to shop daily instead of getting the piles of shopping we get these days.

I was married in the parish church on 3 October 1959. When we first married we went to live in Chessington. Then we moved to Leatherhead. We always seem to gravitate back here again.

LEATHERHEAD & DISTRICT LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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Monthly meetings at the Letherhead Institute every third Friday
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Museum (Hampton Cottage): open Thursdays and Fridays 1pm - 4pm
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This tries to answer questions about the histories of Leatherhead,
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Viewing the Fire Brigade at Leatherhead Clock Tower c1905

Petrina Barnes, Lady Captain of the Mole Valley Indoor Bowls Club, with one of six historic photos from the Museum collection now on display in the bowls hall at Leatherhead Leisure Centre. Others show Bridge Street in 1910 and 1930, the Old Mill on the River Mole, North Street in 1902 and St Mary's and St Nicholas Church lych gate in 1909. The Bowls Club, which now owns the blow-ups, itself dates back more than 40 years. It made a donation to the Society in thanks.

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Music by Handel, Vaughan Williams, Brahms,

Prokofiev & Rachmaninov



Chloe Hanslip

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London Philharmonic Orchestra

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